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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/I

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SUBJECT: FORWARD MOMENTUM, BUT IRAQ STILL A BITTER PILL FOR  
MANY JORDANIANS

REF: A. AMMAN 1658

[B](#). AMMAN 1789

[C](#). AMMAN 2371

[D](#). AMMAN 2381

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary and Comment: Jordanian officials have conveyed to us their satisfaction with the recent mutual measures between Jordan and Iraq to improve strained ties. Most notable have been the King's August 11 trip to Iraq, which made him the first Arab leader to do so since the fall of Saddam Hussein; Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki's mid-June visit to Amman; and Jordan's plan to dispatch an Ambassador to Baghdad (Refs A-D). But despite this real progress, conversations both before and after the King's visit show a deep well of misgivings among both policy practitioners and observers. While Jordanians, led by their King, appear to be growing used to the idea of a rapprochement with Iraq, many of our contacts cast the goal in terms of countering Iran rather than embracing or bolstering Maliki. End Summary and Comment.

[2](#). (C) Mid-level officials and some foreign policy observers we spoke to acknowledged an improvement in Iraq's security situation, and some were tentatively impressed by Maliki's confrontation with Jaysh Al-Mahdi. But most of our contacts lacked confidence the good news would last. Omar Nahar, Director of Policy Planning and Research at the Foreign Ministry, said on July 15: "There is definitely an appreciation for U.S. positions vis a vis Iraq that are being accommodated by Jordan. We do see a change in Iraq, but personally I'm not as optimistic as the U.S." Sultan al-Hattab, a senior columnist at the pro-government Al-Ra'i newspaper, on July 20, acknowledged positive shifts in Maliki's behavior, but he judged Maliki was motivated mainly by an instinct to survive politically and to be more accepted in the Arab world, and that any shift away from sectarianism on his part was just temporary. The University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies Director Nawaf Al-Tel, who until recently headed the MFA's Negotiations Coordination Bureau, was less charitable. He expressed wonder on July 9 at what he saw as a change of heart by the U.S. in moving from harsh criticism to embrace of Maliki. The U.S., in his view, is convincing itself that Maliki is doing a good job, so if withdrawal becomes necessary it will not be portrayed as a failure. "I don't see goodwill," Tel lamented. "Jordan is willing to go the extra mile. Opening an Embassy and sending an Ambassador - this is an extra mile."

Iraq's (Shi'a) Leaders Cannot Be Trusted  
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[3](#). (C) A well-worn if sensitive topic that still percolates beneath codewords is concern over the rise of Iraq's Shi'a to power. The MFA's Nahar insisted that "we don't like to differentiate between Shi'a and Sunnis as such; at the end of

the day it's one Iraq." When PolOff observed how often Jordanians fret about Iran's "penetration" of Iraq and lament the influence of the Najaf Ayatollahs, Nahar responded that "I'm not saying that we do not differentiate. It's just that we do not like to." Several of our contacts justified their concerns with theology, citing the (note: oft-misunderstood and -exaggerated) Shi'a concept of sanctioned dissimulation in the face of oppression - Taqiyyah - to question the inherent trustworthiness of Iraq's new leaders. Others were more circumspect about invoking religion directly, but still questioned the Arab bona fides of Iraq's leadership.

14. (C) Like many of our contacts, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the independent Arabic Daily Al-Ghad, Saad Hattar - who covered the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its aftermath as a reporter - touted the millions of "good Shi'ites" in Iraq. But he insisted that the Maliki government takes its marching orders directly from the mullahs in Iran. "When we sit with Jordanian officials," Hattar recounted, "they speak their hearts," and fear that "everything will land in Iran's hand." Philadelphia University professor Ibrahim Badran stressed that Jordan wants a friendly "Arab country" for a neighbor, and questioned whether the U.S. understood how obsessed people of the region are with Iraq's Arabness. "I am worried about Taqiyyah," he concluded. Former MP Husni Shiab, an international relations professor at Al-Isra University, accused the U.S. of purposefully bringing to power an untrustworthy Shia religious alliance. Omran al-Khatib, a Jordanian-Palestinian who heads the regional bureau for the Palestine Arab Front (a small, pro-Oslo breakaway political faction of the historically Iraq-backed Arab Liberation Front) argued any criticism by Maliki of Iran was a "trick."

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15. (C) Dr. Mohammad Abu Hdeib, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of Parliament, suggested in a July 22 meeting that the Iraqi constitution must be amended, as Iraq's Sunni Arabs had been disenfranchised. Neither they nor the Arab states would accept a Shi'a-run government in Baghdad, he claimed, while Arab representation in Iraq must grow beyond mere diplomats if the Arab states want to help change the political map in Iraq to replace the current government with "real Iraqis" in the next parliamentary elections. Abu Hdeib's Upper House counterpart, Senator Faisal al-Fayez (Prime Minister, 2003-05), recalled the King's warning about a Shi'a crescent hanging over the region and lamented His Majesty's ostensible prescience. "From what I hear, the Ministry of Interior is 100 percent controlled by the Iranians," Fayez offered.

16. (C) Not all of our contacts are so pessimistic. One of Fayez's predecessors, Senator Marwan Dudin, enthusiastically supported the King's visit to Iraq, saying Jordan's economic interests trumped other concerns. Speaking two days after the trip, he resorted to a fraught historical analogy (one that we have heard from others) that the warming of ties was akin to when, in the service of greater national interests, King Hussein ultimately embraced Abd al-Karim Qasim, despite the brutal slaughter of members of the Iraq branch of the Hashemite family during the coup Qasim led in 1958. Some of our interlocutors put things more positively, citing Maliki's recent actions as evidence that he was a worthwhile partner. Director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies Oraib Rantawi saw Maliki becoming "more balanced" (if insufficiently so) toward the Sunnis and saw no logical explanation for the GOI's laudable moves against the Jaysh Al-Mahdi that could be attributed to Iranian influence. Rantawi said that he cared more about outcomes than any latent pro-Iran, sectarian instinct that may remain in Maliki's heart; of late, the outcomes have been encouraging. Jamal Al-Refai, a political analyst with a long history of Iraqi contacts, was also impressed by Maliki's recent moves against the JAM. "After Maliki did what he did in Basrah, he proves day after day that he is not acting as a Shi'a or pro-Iran."

## Carrying a (Dimming) Torch for Allawi

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¶7. (C) Many of our interlocutors cited former Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi as the sort of leader Iraq needs, that Jordan wants, and whom the Arabs could accept. Most acknowledged, however, that it was unlikely he would find himself back in power. Faisal Al-Rfouh, Chairman of the Political Science Department at the University of Jordan, thought political realities might leave Jordan little choice but to deal with Maliki, but suggested a better alternative would be if Allawi - or another "secular, liberal, Ba'thist, who suffered under Saddam" like him - were installed. Al-Ghad Deputy Editor Hattar doubted Maliki could be pried from Iran's grasp and called for bringing a secular, pan-Arab figure to power: "You need somebody indigenous who doesn't see Iraq as the 'smashed wing' of Iran." Allawi fit the bill, and Hattar predicted a bright political future for him.

When PolOff pointed out that only a tiny fraction of Sunnis and Kurds had voted for him last time (despite his hoped-for appeal across sectarian lines), Hattar theorized that the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs of Iraq had learned the error of their ways, having been "beaten by the negative attitude of mullah governments."

¶8. (C) Not everyone was enthusiastic about Allawi or his prospects. For example, even as CSS's Tel argued that bilateral relations during Allawi's tenure were warmer than they had been since 1990, he asserted that the former PM was corrupt and "the reality of things makes him no one to bet on." Yasar Qatarneh, Director of the Regional Center on Conflict Prevention at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, assessed that it had been a mistake on Jordan's part to focus so single-mindedly on supporting Allawi, whose main attribute in Qatarneh's view was that he was well-connected in Jordan: "The GID, they knew him well." Fakhri Abu Shakra, formerly head of the World Affairs Council, said he had not been impressed by Allawi while he was Prime Minister because he was tainted by corruption. Shakra argued that one cannot really be a nationalist - Allawi's calling card - if one was mainly working for oneself.

## Concerns About Stability When U.S. Departs

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¶9. (C) Like many, Senator Fayeze was pessimistic about Iraq's short- and medium-term future, predicting chaos and civil war

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once U.S troops left. What Iraq needs is either to once again come under the umbrella of the Hashemites who ruled Iraq from the 1920s to the 1950s (Fayeze was not optimistic this was in the offing), or the return of a strong man. "You also need a strong Mukhabarat," he continued, arguing that Saddam's intelligence apparatus, once purged of its senior leaders, should have remained whole: "They knew everything about every person." "I don't think democracy will work," he assessed, adding that "external factors" like Iranian ambitions, would prevent stability.

¶10. (C) CSS's Tel said Jordan was resigned to the fact that Iraq's pre-2003 social and political structure had irrevocably changed, but he feared that "we do not see a new social contract in the making that would define the future." Looking at matters from an economic perspective, Badran, who from 1984-1990 helped negotiate Jordan-Iraq oil and trade deals, noted that today "when it comes to business, it is not easy to do so with Iraq. We signed an oil agreement three years ago. There has been talk about building a pipeline," but there has been no follow through. Badran seemed more disturbed with what he saw as high-handed behavior of Iraq's present leaders toward Jordan. Maliki's government is weak and should recognize that it is in a plaintiff position toward the Arab states.

¶11. (C) A few of our contacts were more optimistic. Abu Shakra thought that things had improved enough that the presence of U.S. troops was not as important a stabilizing factor as it was two years ago. He thought a gradual withdrawal of troops would give the government space to build the army and the police, and take away the *raison d'etre* of some of the resistance, whether Shi'a or Sunni. As for political trends, he said, "the current government has no choice. They will not be under the thumb of Iran. They will come back to the Arab world."

Some Concede that Jordan, Arab States, Share Blame  
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¶12. (C) Our contacts often cited objective security concerns for the long delay in appointing a new Ambassador to Iraq, and the initial cancellation of the King's visit in early July, pointing out that the Jordanian Embassy had been blown up in August 2003 and that Algerian and Egyptian envoys had been kidnapped. But some acknowledged that it had been a mistake to be so standoffish with the Government of Iraq, as this had merely left Iran free to flex its muscles and left the Arabs with little leverage. Muhammad al-Khalidi, Director of the Arab and Middle East Affairs Department at the MFA, opined that Jordan and the other Arab states erred not establishing a strong presence in Iraq earlier. This left the door open to Iranian penetration, which will now be harder to excise. Although doubtful that Maliki would ultimately resist Iran's influence, he conceded that it was natural for there to be close relations between the two countries, which share a long border and numerous trade interests.

¶13. (C) The Institute of Diplomacy's Qatarneh thought Jordan should have moved earlier to engage with Iraq and Iraqis of all stripes. Having failed to embrace Maliki and his predecessors, "the Arab States left it open for everyone else. Now they complain that the Iranians are there." He further questioned why the Arab states should have expected that Iraq's new government would lean the other direction. "How can I expect a sudden distancing between the Shia and Iran? Jordan was a main supporter of Saddam," he noted, pointing out that this cannot have sat well with the new leaders in Baghdad. Political analyst Refai had harsher words for his government's policies. The Arabs should have established and maintained solid diplomatic relations with the new Iraq years ago. Refai was more explanatory than accusatory in explaining the Maliki government's ties with Iran, noting how "the people now in power used to be supported by Iran, so they have bills to pay." Either way, concluded Refai - pointing out that many of his compatriots would disagree - "60 percent of Iraq is Shia. It's a fact. We have to deal with it."  
Beecroft